

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claims 1-11 (Canceled)

12. (New) A device for inerting a vat having an upper wall and a single upper opening and containing a consumable liquid and an overhead gas, said device comprising:

a downward extending injection tube having an upper end connected to said upper opening of the vat and a lower end extending close to a free surface of the consumable liquid in the vat;

a tubular connector fitted onto the upper opening of the vat, said connector having an inlet for passage of an inerting gas, an outlet for passage of the overhead gas and a side wall enclosing an upper portion of the injection tube, the side wall being provided with an orifice to purge the overhead gas.

13. (New) A device according to claim 12, further including a gas diffuser at the lower end of the injection tube.

14. (New) The device according to claim 13, wherein the gas diffuser has a lower end closed off by a horizontal plate larger than the cross section of the injection tube and the inerting gas is injected through a perforated portion of the diffuser above the horizontal plate.

15. (New) The device according to claim 12, further including a source of an inerting gas heavier than air connected to the injection tube.

16. (New) The device according to claim 12, further including a safety valve connected to the side wall of the connector.

17. (New) The device according to claim 12, wherein the injection tube is adjustable in length.

18. (New) The device according to claim 12, wherein the consumable liquid is wine.

19. (New) The device according to claim 12, wherein the inerting gas comprises a mixture of about 75 to 80% of a neutral gas and the remainder comprises CO₂.

20. (New) The device according to claim 19, wherein the neutral gas comprises argon.

21. (New) The device according to claim 12, further including a means for measuring the oxygen level in the overhead gas.

22. (New) The device according to claim 12, further including means for adjusting the pressure of the inerting gas.